
RISING ABOVE THE ODDS

*My Journey from Pain and Prison to
Power and Purpose*

Sharmain Harris

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Dedication

To the ones I lost along the way, your memory pushes me to rise every day.

To my family, who endured the storm with me, felt every hit, and kept believing when I gave them every reason not to.

To every person standing at the crossroads of choices—know that no mistake is too great, no past too heavy, no circumstance too permanent to change.

To those still trapped in the cycle, still fighting unseen battles, still wearing invisible chains—this is for you. May my story be proof that transformation is not only possible, but it's waiting on the other side of your decision.

And to the streets and the system that tried to define me, you forged the fire, but I rose from it.

Thank You!

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Prologue

“Yo, who dis?” I said as I answered my chrome-colored razor flip phone.

“It’s me, man. Let me get five bags of Doritos,” said the drug addict on the other end of the line. After telling him I was all out of crack for the day, I hung up the phone and laid back the car seat of my white Envoy and puffed my blunt.

Sitting beside me in the passenger seat, my cousin sat up and asked, “Who was that?”

“Just somebody trying to get some work,” I said, turning up “Trap House” by the rapper Gucci Mane, which was playing on the stereo. The year was 2009, and I was a small-time drug dealer. That day, I had sold out of crack and was waiting to meet my plug. “Man, cuz, you should let me get him,” my cousin said

desperately. He was asking me to allow him to sell fake drugs to the addict who called me.

"You know what, bro, I don't really care about this dude. I'm all out. If that's what you want to do, go ahead."

"Bet!" he said as he exited the car and ran into my girlfriend's apartment to create the fake crack packages.

He quickly jumped back in the car and said, "Let's go."

"Man, let me see what the hell you got." He showed me five small bags of white powder wrapped in clear sandwich bags. He'd taken some drywall, crunched it, and bagged it up. "I just need to do this one time so I can get some Pampers and milk. My baby momma has been complaining all day."

I called the drug addict back and told him to meet us at one of our usual spots.

On that cold January day, I drove down the slushy Kenosha streets to the meeting spot. After I pulled into the alley, I parked the truck. "Alright, I will be right back," my cousin said as he got out of the truck and headed to the front of Mike's Corner Store. I let my seat back again, sparked my blunt back up, and blasted my music. Next thing I knew, my cousin was opening the door and jumping into the seat. Almost out of breath, he said, "We gotta go,

man! The police are following me.” I sat up, threw my blunt out the window, and sped off.

We pulled out of the small alley and headed down the busy street until we reached the gas station. “Man, cuz, I don’t think we should stop. I think ole boy was trying to set us up because the detectives were right there.” I got out of the truck and went into the gas station to put thirty dollars on pump one. When I left the store, I looked around for police but didn’t see any. “Man, this nigga is tripping,” I thought to myself. I got back in the car and told my cousin he was paranoid and to calm down.

Unfortunately for me, he wasn’t tripping and had every right to be paranoid.

As soon as we pulled out of the gas station, red and blue lights flashed like strobe lights. Three patrol cars and two undercover detectives from the gang unit boxed my truck in like a pizza. Before I could even think, my cousin jumped out and ran. I tried to do the same on my side, but the patrol car had already pinned its bumper against my door.

“Fuck!” I yelled as I threw my hands up in the air. I turned to the side and watched my cousin, who was pinned face down on the ground, being handcuffed. Another officer came to my driver’s side window and

demanded that I step out of the car. I was cuffed, thrown in the back of the police car, and headed to jail.

On the ride to the police station, a million thoughts raced through my head. I'd been arrested a few times before, but this felt different. Normally, when I was arrested, I was taken to the sally port entrance. This time, I was taken to the detective's side to be interrogated. I knew this because I'd been interrogated before.

I figured I was going to be interrogated this time about a different crime or asked about someone I was connected to. I was involved in many things in the streets. At the very least, I thought my cousin was about to be charged for the recent transaction. In that case, they would question me, I wouldn't say anything and bail my cousin out hours later.

But I was sadly mistaken.

Two detectives walked into the interrogation room smiling. "What up, Slim? We have you on three controlled buys over the last month," said the first detective. "You are being charged with manufacturing and delivering crack cocaine. You can either confess now or take this to trial."

Then the second detective said, "We already got a confession out of...your cousin,

right? Once we told him his charges, he blamed it all on you, Mr. King Pin.” He started laughing.

I took it all in. I couldn’t believe I was in this position. In that moment, I could hear my father say, “You are who you hang around.”

Two years before my arrest, my father had driven me six hours to attend the University of Wisconsin-Stout. He was so proud to see me do something with myself. He and I both knew the narrow odds of a young black man from the ghetto making it out. Especially those of us involved in gangs and the street. We’d heard it all the time: “You are either going to end up dead or in jail.” I’d gotten out but decided to drop out of college, and here I was headed to jail.

After the detectives realized I wasn’t buying into their games, they sent me to booking. Officially charged, it was time to face the consequences. I changed over into the dingy, stained, used underwear and slid into the dark blue county jail uniform. As the guards bagged all of my belongings, they asked if I wanted to make a phone call. As shameful as I was, I called my dad. He didn’t answer the phone, and I was glad he didn’t. I was ashamed of myself.

I called my girlfriend right after, and she answered. "Oh no. Oh my God, Doony (my nickname), what's going on?" I explained everything to her and told her to call and tell my dad I was in jail.

"I will most likely have court tomorrow. I'll call you in the morning," I said as I hung up.

My next court date was a bail hearing. It was set at an amount I couldn't reach. Though I was selling drugs to make money, I recklessly spent it on clothes, weed, and jewelry. This was the life I thought was meant for me. I enjoyed the thrill of the lifestyle, and though I knew of the possibility, I wasn't prepared for jail.

I called around, hoping someone would contribute to my bail, but no one showed up. I sat in jail for two months trying to figure out how to get out of this situation. I tried praying to God, but I don't think he heard me. After all, I was only coming for help because it was an emergency. The more I prayed, the worse things seemed to get.

After meeting with my public defender, I found out my cousin did offer information about me to the police. He claimed I forced him to sell drugs. At the next court date, I was painted out to be a drug kingpin and a leader of a gang. This couldn't be further from the

truth. If I were a kingpin, I would have been able to bail myself out of jail. Instead, I was preparing to either accept a plea deal for prison or take it to trial.

In the midst of all this chaos, I did receive some good news. I called my father, and he told me he was coming to bail me out.

“Son, I need you to take this seriously. I had to take a loan out on my house for your bail.” I was so grateful at the moment, but time would show that I didn’t take it seriously.

The next day, I paced back and forth, waiting for my name to be called. I couldn’t even eat. I just wanted to go home. Around 7 pm, my name was called, and I was released on bail. With the charges hovering over my life, I promised myself I would walk a straight path. I planned to get a job, get back in school, and show the courts I was not the kingpin I was painted to be. Sadly, I did nothing I planned, and things got worse for me.

The first month I was out of jail, I was right back to the same lifestyle. Selling drugs, chasing women, and committing violent crimes. The most violent one was an all-out brawl that brought on additional charges of reckless endangerment.

“Wasup bitch ass nigga” the guy said as he ran up on me and hit me from behind. It was someone I’d robbed at gunpoint before my drug charges. I turned around to a fury of punches. Some landed, some didn’t. After ducking under one of his wild punches, I threw a haymaker that landed square on his chin. His body went limp, and he fell on the hot summer ground. In a full rage, I stomped his head into the ground before picking up a cheap Walmart barbecue grill and slamming it on his body. Charcoal dust flew everywhere.

“Stop,” a lady yelled to get my attention. I looked to the side and saw the fear in her eyes. She was a family member of the man I was fighting. Sensing her fear, I stopped and left the area, but this wouldn’t be the end of this feud.

Later that day, I came back to the area of the fight with a crew of guys I rolled with heavily. We strolled down the street on that unusually hot spring day. We noticed a group from afar, and someone with me yelled, “There they go, right there.” We walked up, and a brawl ensued. Bats, bricks, and other weapons were used by both groups of men. I was struck in my ribs with a bat but was able to clamp down and take it. Now with bat in hand, I went to work hitting every person in

sight. It wasn't long before the police swarmed the area, and we all scattered like roaches. I didn't think it would turn into something bigger, but my name was mentioned to the police, saying that I started the fight. Since I was out on bail, another warrant for my arrest was issued. Because of pride, I'd messed up my life again and was headed back to jail.

A few weeks later, I was rearrested and charged with second-degree reckless endangerment, among a host of other charges. As I was being booked again, I was offered a free phone call. I didn't even bother calling anyone. I felt as though no one would want to talk to a failure like me. Especially not my father, since I jeopardized his home with my actions. I accepted the reality of my life at this time and the strong possibility of going to prison. I had no intention of taking any of the cases to trial. From what I knew, the odds of winning a trial were slim to none. There was no avoiding the consequences that came from my actions.

"Whatever is going to happen, is going to happen," I thought to myself.

After accepting plea deals, my sentencing date came fast. I prepared myself and hoped for the best but expected the worst. My life was hanging in the balance. Shackled by my

wrists and ankles, I stepped off the elevator and saw my family sitting in the hallway. My mother cried as I passed her on the way into the courtroom. The fate of her middle child was out of her control. After taking my seat, I turned to see my siblings, each one looking discouraged. My father was the only one who showed strength. Strength I needed at that moment.

“All rise,” the bailiff said as the judge entered the room.

“You may be seated,” said the judge as the proceedings began. My life was about to change forever.

What Are the Odds?

How did I end up here? That’s the question I asked myself as I sat in the courtroom, replaying every moment that led me there.

Before going through the process myself, I had watched countless others go to prison for selling drugs. Many who grew up in the same environment as me. Just some poor kids trying to survive the best way we knew. Kids whose fathers also went to prison for selling drugs, leaving us to fend for ourselves and our single mothers. The odds of us repeating the

cycle were high. I was now at the same crossroads I had watched countless others face before. "Maybe it was just my turn," I thought to myself while sitting there with my arms and legs shackled.

Finally, it was over. I walked back to my cell with a one-year sentence in the Kenosha County Detention Center. It didn't go as badly as I thought it would. I was certain I was going to prison for at least five years. I also received four years of probation. Failing to complete probation would result in prison time between five and fifteen years. The thought of going to prison scared me, but not enough.

I was released from jail in 2010, and in 2011, I was returning. This time, I was headed to prison.